

A Study of Students' Preferences Towards Native and Non-native English Teachers at Guangxi University of Finance and Economics, China

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Abstract

This study investigated students' preferences towards native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). The research methodology employed a mixed-method, which included a questionnaire and an interview. The participants were thirty Year 1 students and thirty-five Year 2 students from the College of International Education (CIE) Program, Guangxi University of Finance and Economics, P. R. China. Results indicated that these two groups of students viewed both NESTs and NNESTs favorably, but that different types of teachers had different strengths. NESTs were considered more effective in teaching culture, speaking, and pronunciation for the target language, but they had some problems communicating with students. NNESTs were more effective in imparting fundamental knowledge (especially grammatical structures), writing, and reading. Their teaching style, however, was rather lacking in traditional class activities. Therefore, this paper suggested that students would benefit from being co-taught by both NESTs and NNESTs.

Keywords: native English-speaking teachers, non-native English-speaking teachers, CIE Program, students' preferences, mixed-method

Background of the Study

Recent research documents have indicated interest towards native and non-native English speaking teachers. Although studies have focused primarily on teachers (Arva & Medgyes 2000; Llurda 2004.), there is a growing body of research highlighting students' preferences (Chit Cheong 2009; Mahboob 2004; Lasagabaster & Sierra 2005). Since China has a large population of EFL learners, and English plays a crucial role in today's global communication, it is necessary to investigate Chinese students' views in this area.

The beginning of the 21st century has witnessed two important developments in English language education in China, the first of which has been the expansion of English language education within the primary curriculum. In 2001, the Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE) required that primary schools located in cities and county seats (towns that are the governmental center of a county) offer English classes in grade 3 from autumn 2001 and that the rest started to do so starting the following year (MOE, 2001). This means that EFL students in China are getting younger every year. According to Gamlam (2016), some schools in China's larger cities offer English classes starting in grade 1, with students being as young as 6 years. The status of

English education in China, therefore, has acquired a quintessential position. It is considered one of the most important subjects in university in China. All students in university, regardless of their major, are required to learn English, not only to gain admission, but also to graduate. Those majoring in subjects other than English are required to pass the College English Test (CET) before graduation. (Yang & Liu, 2016)

The second key development has been the increasing number of students entering colleges and universities nationwide (Rao & Yuan, 2015). In 2017, 8 million students graduated from universities in China. This number has increased more than 10 times since 1979 (Stapleton, 2017). Moreover, as was mentioned above, students have begun to learn English in China at a significantly younger age compared to the past. This means that a vast number of English teachers are needed, but the most serious constraint at the moment is the lack of qualified teachers (Rao, 2010). China has to decide between recruiting more NNESTs whether they are qualified or not, thereby jeopardizing the quality of ELT itself, and recruiting NESTs which does not automatically guarantee a higher standard of teaching than NNESTs (Mairi, Febriani, & Solusia, 2018). According to the news article written by Wang (2015) in China Daily, Beijing Bureau of Foreign Experts Affairs stated that approximately only 500 registered institutions in Beijing are legally qualified to issue “expert certificates” to NESTs. Currently, however, there are more than 7,000 ESL institutions whose employment of NESTs remains unregulated.

Considering the current situation in China, it is Chinese students who are the ones being affected the most by this dramatic change in English education. Their experience and opinions about the issue deserve careful attention. This study therefore could contribute to our understanding of Chinese students’ preferences towards NESTs and NNESTs. Other EFL countries or regions where English is taught by both groups of teachers such as South Korea, Japan, and Thailand could benefit from this study as well.

Research Question

1. What are the students’ preferences towards NESTs and NNESTs?
2. What are the students’ opinions towards studying with NESTs and NNESTs?

Research Objectives

1. To examine students’ preferences towards NESTs and NNESTs.
2. To explore students’ opinions towards studying with NESTs and NNESTs.

Literature Review

Native English-speaking teachers are often considered linguistic models for their learners given the emphasis these teachers place on oral communicative competence in foreign language teaching (Sung, 2011; Brown & Lee 2015). Wood (2017) also stated that students acknowledged the valuable cultural insight that NESTs brought to their classrooms. Moreover, NESTs provided encouraging English speaking environments for their students (Chun, 2014; Wood, 2017). However, native speakers of a language may not possess fundamental knowledge of the language they speak. In fact, the very construct of “native speakers” is complex and cannot be precisely defined (Davies, 2003). Moreover, NESTs teaching in another country may lack background knowledge of the country they work in and may, as such, be in a less advantageous position than local colleagues in understanding the language produced by students (Luk & Lin, 2007).

Several studies have investigated students' perspectives on NESTs and NNESTs. For example, Lasagabaster & Sierra (2002) studied the attitudes of undergraduate students in Spain regarding NESTs and NNESTs. In general, students in the study preferred to be taught either by NESTs, or both NESTs and NNESTs. In specific areas of language learning, students preferred NESTs for subjects connected with oral skills including pronunciation, culture and civilization, speaking, and to a lesser extent, vocabulary (Chit Cheong, 2009; Mahboob, 2004; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005). On the other hand, NNESTs were well appreciated overall for their understanding of grammar (Mahboob, 2004; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Brown & Lee, 2015), for personal factors such as being ESL learners themselves, for being perceived as hard-workers (Mahboob, 2004), and for their empathy towards students because NNESTs had experienced similar difficulties as their students (Chit Cheong, 2009; Ma, 2012).

In addition, students' preferences towards NESTs and NNESTs would also be dependent on their level of studies (Sun, Wang & Liu, 2015). According to Lasagabaster & Sierra (2002), although university students held positive attitudes towards NNESTs, they seemed to prefer NESTs when it came to teaching at the university level. Alseweed (2012) also found that higher-level students preferred NESTs. However, they held a different view when it came to primary education. That is, they preferred NNESTs to teach at the primary level. (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005). In contrast, some studies showed that positive attitudes towards NNESTs increased over a period of time at the university level (Moussu & Braine, 2006; Ling & Braine, 2007). For example, students who had been taught by NNESTs previously (before university) showed more positive attitudes towards them than those who had never been taught by NNESTs. Furthermore, Chinese, Japanese, South Korean and Thai students had less positive attitudes towards both NESTs and NNESTs than did Portuguese, French and Spanish students (Sung, 2014).

With the globalization of English and the recognition of World Englishes (Crystal, 2003), the number of English learners around the world has drastically increased over the past several decades. Crystal (2003) also points to the importance of learning English in second and foreign language contexts. Such an ever-increasing demand for learning English has led to a greater need for well-educated and highly qualified English as a Foreign Language/ English as a Second Language (EFL/ESL) teachers.

Research Methodology

Context of Study

This study was conducted in China at the university level. Generally, there are two types of EFL instruction at the university level in China. One is for English majors and the other is for non-English majors. Traditionally, EFL teaching for English majors in Chinese universities follows a four-year program that provides foundational courses in listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation (Rao, 2010). Since 2000, a new college has emerged in universities called the 'College of International Education (CIE)', founded as a bridge between China and the world. This kind of college aims at developing students' competence in English by also equipping them with professional skills in order to cater to the current situation of English being the lingua franca of the world.

Guangxi University of Finance and Economics (GXUFE) is located in Nanning, the capital city of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, in Southeastern China. It has two colleges (institutes) with students majoring in English. One is the College of Foreign Languages (which

offers TEFL programs, English Translation programs, and Business English programs). The other is CIE (which offers Sino-British programs, Sino-American programs, and Sino-Canadian programs). These departments train most of the English language teachers in China and recruit NESTs as faculty members to teach courses in the fields of English language, literature, and pedagogy. Both colleges have NESTs and NNETs as English instruments.

Population and Sample

The population was comprised of English-major students from Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, and the samples were 65 English major students from the College of International Education Department, Guangxi University of Finance and Economics. They were selected by purposive sampling. There were 30 first-year students and 35 second-year students. All of them studied with both NESTs and NNETs.

In this study, the researcher chose CIE students as the sample because they were co-taught by a pair of NESTs and NNETs. CIE has almost the same number of NESTs compared to NNETs, and students from CIE have more experiences being taught by NESTs compared to College of Foreign Languages. Besides, the researcher used only first and second-year students as the sample because CIE has a two-year program. Students in this program learn fundamental English in Year 1 and Year 2, before being required to choose a specialized field in Year 3 and Year 4 when they might transfer to other colleges.

Research Instruments

There are two research instruments in this study: a survey and a semi-structured interview.

A. Questionnaire.

The questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data. It was based on three studies: 1) *Exploring the identity of pre-service NNETs in Taiwan: A social relationally approach* (Wang & Lin, 2014); 2) *University Students' Perceptions of Native and Non-native Speaker Teachers of English* (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002), and 3) *EFL Learners' beliefs about native and non-native English-speaking teachers: Perceived strengths, weaknesses, and preferences* (Sung, 2014). The researcher adapted the 3 surveys to suit the context of CIE, Guangxi University of Finance and Economics.

In Part One, participants were first asked to choose which type of teacher they believed was more competent at teaching in academic year 2017 with respect to 10 areas of English teaching including four language skills, pronunciation, grammar, and cultural knowledge. Four options were given:

1. *Native speakers (NS)* referred to foreign teachers from the United States, UK, and Canada.
2. *Chinese (Ch)* represented Chinese English teachers of the program.
3. *They are equally good (E)* meant both NS and Chinese English teachers were equally good.
4. *Depends on the teacher (D)* meant any teacher, NS or Chinese English, who used good teaching strategies and had strong command over the English language was competent.

In Part Two, the participants were asked to express their opinions about NESTs and NNETs by completing a five-point Likert scale, which had a total of 22 questions. Thus, there were 32 items in total for the survey part. The questionnaire was administered

after the researcher had clearly explained the procedure and made it clear to the participants that their responses would be used for research purposes only.

B. Interview

In section two, individual in-depth interviews were used to collect qualitative data from 10% of the participants who were randomly selected. The interview was semi-structured. Each interview lasted approximately 20-30 minutes.

Two Thai experts and one Chinese expert in the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language validated both the questionnaire and the interview questions.

Data Collection

The participants were asked to complete the questionnaires during class time, and it took approximately 20 minutes to complete, after which, six students were selected randomly for interviews. The interviews were audio-recorded, and conducted in Chinese only, so that the participants were able to express their ideas to the best of their ability. The interviews were fully transcribed, and interviews conducted in Chinese will be translated to English by the researcher. To ensure the context reliability, an accredited professional translator checked 20% of the translated transcripts.

Data Analysis

A. Quantitative Data

The researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for the quantitative data included in the questionnaire. Percentages were used for Part 1, while Independent T-Test comparing Year 1 and Year 2 students (two groups – 2 tailed) was used for Part 2.

B. Qualitative Data

Content analysis was used for the interview data. The researcher identified relevant content and chose the quotes to support students' opinions.

Findings

Part 1

Table 1: Comparison of Year 1 and Year 2 Students' Preferences Towards English Teachers in Different Areas (N=65)

	NS: Native speakers E: They are equally good	Ch: Chinese teachers D: Depends on the teacher			
Item	NS (%)	Ch (%)	E (%)	D (%)	Total (%)
1. Listening	38.5	16.9	16.9	27.7	100
2. Speaking	46.2	10.8	20.0	23.1	100
3. Reading	23.1	40.0	20.0	16.9	100
4. Writing	7.7	56.9	20.0	13.8	98.5
5. Pronunciation	43.1	15.4	26.2	13.8	98.5
6. Grammar	7.7	69.2	12.3	10.8	100
7. Culture	47.7	7.7	27.7	16.9	100
8. Interaction	30.8	9.2	33.8	24.6	98.5
9. Test	9.2	35.4	36.9	18.5	100
10. Sensitivity	13.8	23.1	35.4	27.7	100

From Table 1, both Year 1 and Year 2 students preferred native speakers to teach cultural knowledge from the target language, improve speaking skills, pronunciation, and listening skills with percentages of 47.7, 46.2, 43.5, and 38.5 respectively.

However, students in both groups preferred Chinese teachers to teach grammar, writing, and reading with percentages of 69.2, 56.9, and 40.4 respectively.

Moreover, students in both groups thought that both groups of teachers were equally good at test preparation; they were both sensitive to the difficulties and problems students face in learning English; and they were also good at preparing students to interact effectively with foreigners outside the classroom, with percentages of 35.4, 36.9, and 33.8 respectively.

Part 2

Table 2: Comparison of Students' Preferences Between Year 1 and Year 2.

(Year 1 N=30, Year 2 N=35)

NESTs: Native English-speaking teachers

NNESTs: Non-Native English-speaking teachers

Item	Statements	Mean	Std.	Sig	df	t
1	In general, I would prefer a native speaker as my English teacher.	-0.176	0.176	0.322	63	-0.999
2	If I could choose, I would prefer to have both native and non-native.	0.257	0.219	0.244	63	1.176
3	It is beneficial for advanced-level students to study with an NEST.	-0.038	0.213	0.858	63	-0.179
4	It is beneficial for advanced-level students to study with an NNEST.	-0.295	0.198	0.142	63	-1.488
5	It is beneficial for intermediate-level students to study with an NEST	-0.062	0.187	0.741	61	-0.332
6	It is beneficial for intermediate-level students to study with an NNEST.	0.306	0.208	0.145	62	1.476
7	It is beneficial for beginner-level students to study with an NEST.	-0.081	0.268	0.763	63	-0.302
8	It is beneficial for beginner-level students to study with an NNEST.	0.414	0.218	0.063	62	1.849
9	An NEST usually uses a variety of teaching methods (e.g. activities, games, role-playing, etc.)	-0.048	0.221	0.83	63	-0.215
10	An NNEST usually uses a variety of teaching methods (e.g. activities, games, role-playing, etc.).	-0.019	0.237	0.936	63	-0.08
11	I often feel frustrated because my NEST does not speak any Chinese.	-0.121	0.292	0.697	61	-0.416
12	I often feel frustrated because my Chinese teacher does not speak much English in class.	0.163	0.228	0.478	62	0.713

Item	Statements	Mean	Std.	Sig	df	t
13	I do not feel that I need to prepare for class because NESTs are not very demanding.	-0.319	0.228	0.167	63	-1.339
14	I do not feel that I need to prepare for class because Chinese teachers are not very demanding.	-0.443	0.206	0.035*	63	-2.155
15	I think I can <i>only</i> learn ‘standard’ or ‘real’ English from an NEST.	-0.581	0.275	0.039*	61	-2.114
16	I think I can learn ‘standard’ or ‘real’ English from a Chinese teacher.	-0.21	0.243	0.392	63	-0.862
17	I would like to interact with my NEST in the classroom as well as outside the classroom.	0.133	0.234	0.571	63	0.569
18	I would like to interact with my Chinese teacher in the classroom as well as outside the classroom.	-0.019	0.21	0.928	63	-0.091
19	The atmosphere is relaxing in an English-speaking teacher’s class.	-0.552	0.21	0.011*	63	-2.627
20	I feel more comfortable when I’m in a Chinese teacher’s class.	-0.51	0.212	0.091*	63	-2.406
22	I have different expectations about learning English from NESTs and NNESTs.	0.057	0.176	0.764	63	0.325

Table 2 shows that students in Year 1 and Year 2 had preferences toward NESTs and NNESTs that were significantly different at .05 level in 4 items: 14, 15, 19, and 20. Considering these items, students in Year 1 and Year 2 had different preferences in the following areas:

Year 1 students agreed that, firstly, class preparation for Chinese teachers was not demanding; secondly, one could learn standard English with NESTs only; thirdly, the atmosphere in NESTs’ classes was relaxing; and lastly, students felt more comfortable in NNESTs’ classes. However, Year 2 students disagreed with Year 1 students in all 4 items.

Interview

In this section, the major interview findings are presented. They were students’ opinions towards studying with NESTs and NNESTs. The excerpts below, translated from Chinese into English, were included in order to allow the opinions of participants to emerge as clearly as possible through quotations. The findings were categorized with 6 themes, according to the 6 interview questions.

Cultural Conflicts/Differences/Problems with NESTs and NNESTs

With regards to cultural conflicts and cultural problems, none of the interviewees experienced those with NNESTs. For NESTs, however, students had some cultural conflicts and problems with class assignments. For instance, NESTs and students had different concepts on how to

present during a role-play. In addition, one student was not comfortable with the western culture of kissing and hugging between NESTs (especially upon first interaction).

The interviewees also compared the differences between NESTs and NNESTs in terms of interaction between teachers and students. For example, one student mentioned that in Chinese culture, asking questions was viewed as questioning the authority of the teacher, but NESTs always encouraged their students to ask questions. Another student said that the way these two groups of teachers answered questions was also different. NNESTs often told them how to solve a problem directly, while NESTs led them to think about how to deal with the problem.

How Students Dealt with Problems

All interviewees expressed that they had to adjust themselves and get used to the cultural differences because they were learning the language of the target culture. Moreover, communication was very important. Students had to negotiate and communicate with NESTs more often to fully understand NESTs' expectations.

Strengths of NESTs and NNESTs

Regarding the strengths, NESTs were perceived by the interviewees to have a variety of teaching strategies. According to all 6 interviewees, NESTs employed methods that were not only engaging but also wide-ranging in nature when teaching English. For example, 3 interviewees mentioned that NESTs incorporated various methods such as role-playing, songs, and short stories into their teaching. As a result, 4 interviewees reported that they very much enjoyed activities taught by NESTs and were motivated to learn English. Moreover, they stated that NESTs could provide an authentic language environment for them to practice English, and improve their speaking skills.

For NNESTs, all interviewees thought their instruction was fundamentally traditional. Chinese teachers emphasized basic knowledge. Students were familiar with their teaching style, and no one misinterpreted what the teachers explained.

Weaknesses of NESTs and NNESTs

As for the weaknesses of NESTs, 4 interviewees stated that sometimes they spoke too fast for non-native learners and beginners to follow. Two participants further noted that some NESTs lacked in-depth knowledge of grammar.

For NNESTs, most of the interviewees indicated that the teaching style of NNESTs' was rigid in nature. They focused too much on the fundamentals of language, so it was not practical for students to use that language in real-life situations. Moreover, it limited creativity and was not good for students to develop their critical-thinking skills.

Class Atmosphere

Both Year 1 and Year 2 participants shared the same opinions in terms of class atmosphere in NNESTs' classes. They thought the atmosphere in their Chinese teachers' classes was passive and monotonous because it was void of activities.

However, Year 1 and Year 2 interviewees held totally different opinions insofar as the atmosphere in the NESTs' classes was concerned: Year 1 students felt quite nervous and stressful in NESTs' classes. On the contrary, Year 2 students thought NESTs created a more causal and relaxed atmosphere.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Language Use in Classes: English-Only

Regarding the advantages, all 6 interviewees said that an English-only class provided an authentic language environment for students to practice both listening and speaking skills, which was very effective. Another main strength of such a policy is that it could increase use of English by students. The more opportunities they were provided to practice English, the more confidence they could garner.

However, 5 interviewees mentioned the disadvantages. Sometimes, the English-only policy was a bit much and they could not follow everything that was said, so they stopped listening to the teachers. It was especially difficult for beginners and students with low English proficiency. If they could not understand the content for a while, they ran the risk of losing confidence.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Using both Chinese and English in Classes

With regards to the advantages, all 6 interviewees noted that using both languages in classes helped them understand the content deeply and with ease. Additionally, two interviewees said that NNESTs were also L2 learners themselves and showed more understanding and empathy when students experienced problems in learning English. This was especially true for vocabulary acquisition and explanation for grammatical rules and structures.

However, one of the interviewees indicated that students lost chances to practice more English if teachers used Chinese in class. Another interviewee said that if every time a student had problems understanding English and a teacher helped translate for them, they would start relying on their teachers for translation, and this was not good for their learning.

Test Preparation

From the overall picture, both Year 1 and Year 2 students had the same opinions towards test preparation: they thought these two types of teachers were equally good. However, a depth interview data revealed that Year 1 students thought that NNESTs provided great help with university exams and Chinese national tests, while Year 2 students thought that NESTs were more helpful, especially with international standardized tests.

Discussion

This study surveyed Year 1 and Year 2 students' preferences towards NESTs and NNESTs in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, and it also investigated students' opinions towards the strengths and weaknesses of these two groups of teachers. The findings showed that NESTs and NNESTs had their own distinctive linguistic, socio-cultural, and pedagogical strengths as well as weaknesses. The findings have suggested that students did not overwhelmingly prefer one type

of teacher to the other, and they held different opinions towards the specific areas of English-teaching competence both groups of teachers brought to the classroom.

Year 1 and Year 2 Students preferred NESTs to teach listening skills, speaking skills, and pronunciation, while also providing personal insights from the target culture. It is perhaps because native speakers can provide a “correct” model of English. Native speakers are often considered linguistic role models for their learners (Sung, 2011; Brown & Lee, 2015). Wood (2017) also stated that students acknowledge the rich cultural information that NESTs brought to the classroom. Students appreciated being taught by NESTs who could provide the necessary background knowledge of the target culture. For example, NESTs could tell students interesting stories from their respective cultures. This finding was in line with several previous studies for Chit Cheong (2009); Mahboob (2004); and Lasagabaster & Sierra (2005).

These two groups of students preferred NNESTs to teach reading, writing, and grammar. This finding is similar to previous studies that stated that NNESTs are well appreciated overall for their knowledge and ability to explain grammar (Mahboob, 2004; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005). Also, they could code-switch when explaining new vocabulary, or difficult grammar rules and concepts. Brown & Lee (2015) said that one of the advantages of NNESTs is that they can provide useful explanations about target forms, meanings, and uses. Students mentioned that NNESTs could explain grammar very clearly. This is mainly because NNESTs can use L1 to explain grammar points when students are confused or misreading certain rules.

Interestingly, the results showed that most students thought both NESTs and NNESTs were equally good at test preparation. One possible explanation for this may involve the different types of tests students face. For Year 1 students, this is perhaps because they focused mainly on the university’s tests and Chinese public examinations. NNESTs were more familiar with local educational systems according to their own learning experience. Furthermore, they understood students’ frustration and difficulties when facing examinations in China. According to students, Chinese teachers could provide materials for students to get used to the format of tests and familiarize themselves with key concepts that usually appear on national tests. Brown & Lee (2015) stated that NNESTs could employ appropriate teaching approaches and use materials that met local requirements.

However, some Year 2 students were preparing to study abroad, or to be exchange students in the future. This meant that they had to prepare for international standardized tests such as the IELTS and TOFEL. NESTs provided great help for such tests, especially when it came to speaking and listening. Some students also said that talking with NESTs could help them to overcome nervousness when interacting with native speakers during the speaking part of such tests. This was primarily because NESTs’ could provide an encouraging English-speaking environment for students (Chun, 2014).

With regards to teaching methods, students were more likely to agree that NESTs applied a wider variety of teaching approaches in class than NNESTs because NESTs usually incorporated many activities, such as role-playing, story-telling, and games. Students enjoyed themselves while learning in NESTs’ classrooms. These findings were in line with the study conducted by Wood (2017) who said that students found comfort and confidence learning with NESTs who used various activities in the classroom, and did not focus on language content only.

Both Year 1 and Year 2 students said that even though NNESTs seldom provided activities compared with NESTs, they focused more on fundamental knowledge. Students felt thankful for their NNESTs because they thought that fundamental knowledge was key understanding the target language better. Furthermore, NNESTs understood students’

frustrations. This is probably because NNESTs are usually from the same linguistic background as their students. Also, NNESTs had experienced the same difficulties their students were facing, as cited in Ma (2012).

With regards to the language use in classroom, students had both positive and negative opinions towards an English-only policy in the classroom. That is, some students preferred being taught by NESTs because they used English only, and they thought it was a good opportunity for them to practice English. On the other hand, some students preferred NNESTs who used both English and Chinese to aid learning because sometimes students could not understand everything an NEST was saying.

In general, both Year 1 and Year 2 students thought that the maximum benefit derived from having an NEST teacher was their ability to provide an English language environment. Wood (2017) said that students in NESTs' classrooms received a lot of L2 input over the duration of the course. This was a rare opportunity for students in Mainland China because most of them lacked a genuine English-speaking environment, for China is a country in the "Outer Circle" in Kachru's categorization (Luk & Lin, 2007).

However, with regards to the weaknesses of using only English in the classroom, the two groups of students said that misunderstandings could take place between NESTs and their students. One of the reasons for this could be that NESTs could not clarify their thoughts and feelings in students' L1. Arva and Medgyes (2000) stated that NESTs' inability to speak the students' L1 could be problematic. One of the reasons why the students did not view NESTs as empathetic, approachable, and understanding was probably because they could not express themselves in Chinese. Students also felt frustrated when NESTs spoke too fast. Therefore, students might lose confidence and motivation to keep up in their classes. This is perhaps because different students have differing levels of English proficiency. Alseweed (2012) found that higher-level students prefer NESTs, while students who cannot follow everything an NEST says tend to prefer NNESTs because their language proficiency was not as good.

With regards to the class atmosphere, both groups of students thought that NNESTs' classes were rather boring because of their traditional teaching styles. NNESTs were more focused on information provided in textbooks and used frequent language exercises found in workbooks. This finding is similar with Liaw (2012) who stated that in classes taught by NNESTs, students perceived instruction as more test-oriented and drill-focused. Therefore, a serious and inflexible learning atmosphere was often experienced when learning with non-native teachers.

In this study, Year 1 and Year 2 students showcased contrasting opinions about the class atmosphere in NESTs' classes. Year 1 students felt very nervous and anxious in NESTs' classes, while Year 2 students thought the NESTs' classes were relatively relaxing. This result could be attributed to the different levels of English proficiency between Year 1 and Year 2 students. Year 1 students did not have any experience learning with NESTs before, and their exposure to English was, as a result, lower than Year 2 students. In contrast, Year 2 students had taken courses in professional English language study with NESTs for at least one year, and were used to the learning environment created by an NEST. Therefore, Year 2 students were more comfortable in NESTs' classes. This finding was similar with Sun, Wang, & Liu (2015) who stated that students' different language levels influenced class atmosphere greatly.

Conclusion

This research investigated Year 1 and Year 2 students' preferences towards NESTs and NNESTs in CIE program, Guangxi University of Finance and Economics, China, by employing a questionnaire and an interview. The findings showed that students had no significant preference towards teachers who were native or non-native speakers. However, both Year 1 and Year 2 students preferred NESTs to teach listening, speaking, and pronunciation skills, while also providing unique cultural insight. They preferred NNESTs to teach reading, writing, and grammar. In addition, both groups of teachers were equally good at test preparation. NNESTs provided help for local tests while NESTs helped students with oral examinations required for international standardized tests.

The results also indicated that both NESTs and NNESTs had their strengths and weaknesses. NESTs could provide an authentic language environment, and the English-only classes could provide students more opportunities to practice English. Furthermore, NESTs used various activities in the classroom, which made the class fun and relaxing. However, students felt frustrated when NESTs spoke too fast. This, coupled with the fact that different students have different levels of English proficiency, led to misunderstandings. The fact that many NESTs could not speak Chinese only made things harder for these students. For NNESTs, their strengths were the fundamental knowledge of English they possessed, and their understanding of the difficulties their students were facing, as they were also L2 learners at one point. That said, NNESTs' classes were a little boring compared to that of NESTs due to their traditional teaching styles.

Pedagogical Implications

This study provided useful information regarding students' needs and expectations to help both NESTs and NNESTs to develop their language teaching skills and strategies. NESTs should consider an individual student's English proficiency and try to adjust their instruction accordingly. This could include talking slowly or using simpler words when teaching introductory-level students. Moreover, NESTs also need to make sure that their explanations for each assignment are clear for students to understand.

Regarding NNESTs, they can do with incorporating more activities to provide more opportunities for students to use English in class. Avoiding focusing too much on information provided in textbooks is also recommended. They could also include materials such as video clips, websites, and smart phone applications for their classes.

In addition, both NESTs and NNESTs were equally competent, but in different areas. Therefore, learning English from a combination of these two groups of teachers would be beneficial for students. Administrators can also make the best use of both NESTs' and NNESTs' skills and experiences by developing a co-teaching model for English language instruction.

Recommendations for Future Research

Firstly, this study dealt with a group of students in a university that is located in Southeastern China. For future research, the data should be collected from other parts of China where CIE programs are implemented in the curriculum. Secondly, the students in this study were from Year 1 and Year 2 only, since CIE is a Two-Year Program. Usually, however, university

students in other programs and colleges also need to learn English. Thus, future research can be conducted with students from Year 1 to Year 4.

In summary, further research is required for students from different levels, different majors and different programs, and in various parts of China to determine the extent to which preferences of students would be similar or different.

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